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SUBJECT: XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE CONTINUES TO SPREAD

REF: PRETORIA 1061

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Deadly xenophobic and inter-ethnic violence continued in Gauteng province on the night of 20 May and into the early morning hours, with more people seeking shelter at police stations, churches, and community shelters. Violence also has spread to Durban in KwaZulu-Natal, though on a much more limited scale. Government officials have strongly condemned the violence, but continue to intimate that "outside forces" are to blame and that South Africans are being used as pawns by those who want to destabilize South Africa because they are jealous of its success. In addition to outside forces, some ANC government officials have blamed the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) for fomenting unrest. Despite a joint national declaration that the ANC and IFP would work together to stop the violence, ANC leaders in KwaZulu-Natal continue to blame the IFP. END SUMMARY.

VIOLENCE GOES INTO SECOND WEEK

¶2. (SBU) Deadly xenophobic and inter-ethnic violence continues to flare up in Gauteng province and is now being reported in KwaZulu-Natal province. The official death toll varies from 22 to mid-30s, and though the number of displaced is hard to quantify, most press articles are quoting around 10,000. Alongside photos of the victims in every major newspaper, there are also numerous photos of unrepentant mobsters on rampages, all smiling, all armed, with some groups including children obviously under the age of 10. Gauteng Premier Sam Shilowa on 20 May admitted that the violence has an ethnic and criminal dimension, in addition to xenophobia.

¶3. (SBU) The spokesperson for the provincial government of Gauteng said publicly on 21 May that the violence has subsided, adding the "situation is under control." This statement was contradicted by NEC member Winnie Mandela's public warning that same morning to any foreigners who take the commuter trains, that the ANC had information foreigners would be targeted, and by fresh press reports about shops being looted on 21 May in Johannesburg. Refugees also continue to seek shelter at police stations, churches or mosques, and community shelters. (COMMENT: Press reports note that much of the violence is being perpetrated in the middle of the night, so even if violence subsided during the day, it could easily flare up again on the evening of 21 May. END COMMENT)

¶4. (SBU) Local press reports in Durban also note that at least 100 hostel dwellers, armed with stones and bottles, converged on Durban's Umbilo suburb on 21 May, threatening

foreigners and asking them to leave the province. Umbilo police spokesperson Captain John Lazarus said the mob had been intimidating Nigerians since late 20 May. The Mercury newspaper reported that at least six foreigners have been injured, one with an ax, though police have denied anyone has been injured. The US Consulate in Durban also notes that some shops closed down early in the CBD today, though the reasons seem to include both fears of xenophobic attacks as well as a police sweep on informal traders. No incidents have been reported in Cape Town, but the city of Cape Town has identified potential flashpoints and has additional police on standby.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE STILL HESITANT

15. (SBU) Both President Mbeki and ANC President Jacob Zuma continue to speak out, condemning the violence. Minister of Safety and Security Charles Nqakula declared that "specialized units" would be deployed (no additional information was given). Robert McBride, the infamous Ekurhuleni metro police chief who is facing drunk driving and other charges was taken off suspended leave and put back on the force. The government has dismissed suggestions that the military come out to quell any further violence. Thus far, almost 300 people are reported to have been arrested in relation to the unrest in Gauteng.

16. (SBU) As of 21 May, Gauteng Premier Sam Shilowa cautioned the SAG against declaring a state of emergency, saying the decision should not be a political one, nor should it be taken in haste. He also said that declaring a state of emergency could become a "habit" and that everytime there was

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a crisis, it would be declared an emergency. He then undermined his own argument by adding that, "a state of emergency implies, as the Constitution states, that the life of the nation is threatened by war, invasion, or general insurrection, disorder, natural disaster, or other public emergency."

BLAME GAME TAKES POLITICAL SLANT

17. (SBU) The South Africa Institute for Race Relations issued a blistering public attack on President Mbeki on 21 May, saying the violence was a direct response to his government's policy failures. SAIRR blamed "poor and ineffective governance" for creating "a perfect storm of lawlessness, poverty, and unfulfilled expectations that has now erupted into violence." The SAG, for its part, is deflecting any criticism by using the common refrain that outsiders jealous of South Africa's success are directly involved in fomenting the violence to destabilize South Africa. Lorna Daniels, spokesperson for the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), confirmed on 20 May that NIA is investigating the root causes of the xenophobic violence. Both Gauteng Minister of Sport Barbara Creecy and provincial ANC spokesperson in Gauteng Nkenke Kekana also publicly declared that there was a "hidden hand" in the violence aiming at destabilizing South Africa's economic hub. In public comments on 20 May, Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Aziz Pahad rejected assertions that xenophobia is the real cause of the violence, saying the current attacks remind him of the politically-motivated violence that erupted shortly before the 1994 election.

18. (SBU) At the onset of the violence, the ANC publicly blamed rival Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) members for instigating the attacks in Alexandra. On 20 May, IFP and ANC issued a joint national statement condemning the violence and vowing to work together. However, not everyone seems to have been briefed on the joint declaration. KZN Community Safety

Minister Bheki Cele said the violence was political, blaming IFP members for orchestrating it. IFP immediately issued another statement, saying it is (again) disturbed the ANC is using the events to score political points.

BOST